

Teacher Talk Time as a Means to Develop Learners Communicative Skills in an EFL Class

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Résumé:

Le programme de cours d'anglais dans nos écoles secondaires de la République démocratique du Congo prévoit l'enseignement de l'anglais à partir de la première année du secondaire bien qu'il y en pas encore pour le secondaire général. Malgré cela, la plupart des élèves qui terminent leurs études secondaires sont incapables d'engager une conversation de dix minutes avec des amis. Mon expérience comme enseignant d'anglais pendant plusieurs années, montre qu'il y a beaucoup de facteurs qui constituent le blocage pour l'apprenant à bien assimiler la langue anglaise: le manque de motivation des élèves, le manque de manuels appropriés, inadéquation, insuffisance du curriculum national, la paresse et la peur de la part des élèves, la monopolisation de la parole par l'enseignant et e fait que l'anglais est enseigné en français. Cette faute qui est partagée entre l'enseignant et l'apprenant (élève) m'amène à développer la part qui revient à l'enseignant, celle de la monopolisation de la parole pendant la transmission de matières. En d'autres termes dans cet article, je veux montrer que le temps, la durée de la prise de la parole par l'enseignant pendant la transmission de la matière devrait diminuer parce que cela affecte l'apprenant/élève à développer des compétences de communication. La méthodologie de l'enseignement de la langue anglaise prévoit au moins 25% du temps à l'enseignant et 75% à l'apprenant (Brown, 2001 :99). Dans ce sens, l'enseignant est le facilitateur, l'entraîneur, le guide, le modérateur et un guide. L'Anglais doit être enseigné comme langue mais pas comme matière quelconque. Dans la plupart des cas, les élèves n'ont pas beaucoup d'occasions pouvant leur faciliter de parler Anglais. Eu égard à ce qui précède, nous disons que les difficultés que l'apprenant/élève éprouve pour s'exprimer couramment en anglais proviennent en grande partie de l'enseignant qui ne lui donne pas beaucoup de temps à pratiquer son anglais en monopolisant la parole pour montrer aux élèves qu'il connaît l'anglais. Ce travail montre comment la monopolisation de la parole par l'enseignant pendant le cours est un frein ou blocage pour l'apprenant à développer l'acquisition des compétences orales dans l'anglais comme langue étrangère par les élèves de nos écoles secondaires de la ville de Bandundu en particulier et ceux de la République Démocratique du Congo en général.

Mots clés: Temps de parole de l'enseignant, environnement de classe, interaction, mise en œuvre, compétence d'expression orale, compétence communicative et modèle d'enseignement

Abstract

The English curriculum in the Democratic Republic of Congo forecasts for the teaching of English from the first year of secondary school. Most students who finish high school are unable to speak English correctly, even to engage in a ten-minute conversation with friends. My experience as an English teacher for several years in high school shows that there are many factors that hinder the learner to assimilate the English language: the lack of motivation on the part of pupils, lack of appropriate textbooks, inadequacy of the national curriculum, laziness and fear on the part of pupils, monopolization of speech by the teacher model and use of French to teach English. This teacher model leads to the teacher's share of monopolizing speech during classroom instruction. In this study, I want to show that the *Teacher Talk Time* during the transmission of his lesson should decrease because this affects the learner time to develop communicative skills. The suggested model for teaching English as a second language provides 25% of the time for the teacher and 75% for the learner so that the teacher is the facilitator, coach, guide, moderator, a helper. English must be taught as a language but not as a subject.

The difficulties that learners have to express themselves fluently in English come greatly due the teacher who does not give a lot of time to learners to practice the English language because he talks too much.

Therefore, this work shows that ‘Teacher Talking too Much’ in the class does not give opportunities to the learner to develop oral skill and master English as a Foreign Language for our secondary schools in Bandundu town in particular and those of the Democratic Republic of Congo in general.

Key words: *Teacher Talking Time, Classroom environment, Interaction, Implement, Speaking Skill, Communicative competence and Teaching Model.*

1. Statement Of The Problem

The problem of teaching English to secondary pupils, oral communication in Bandundu town has not yet been solved. Because of the significant role that the teacher held in the classroom environment, many researchers like Bailey (2005) and Goh (2007) have proposed methods to enhance speaking skills by means of syllabus design, teaching principles, types of tasks and materials, and speaking assessment. Learning is easily fulfilled when the learner is exposed or given more opportunities to practice what he learns. After a long career as a teacher of English in secondary schools, I have noticed that pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to communicate, to speak, to debate and to negotiate during the teaching process. Most teachers speak too much, i.e Teacher Talks Too Much (TTTM) simply to show that they know the English language. The Teacher Talking Time (TTT) during the instructions is more than the learner’s while the learner is the center of teaching and learning and teaching should be learner-centered.

Achieving the balance Learner Talk/Teacher Talk is one of the difficulties that explains why most pupils in our EFL classes in DRC have problems to communicate in English or expressing themselves in this target language. Most times, they can limit themselves to mere sketchy greetings and cannot engage a full-blown conversation with their peers. The talkative teacher’s attitude does not allow learners to acquire easily the oral competence. Learners are put aside; they become listeners, recipients and observers rather than being the ‘actors’ at the center. Therefore, it is advisable for teachers to activate then other teacher roles of facilitators, guides, coach and helpers rather than being talkative or Teacher Talking Too Much (TTTM). In other words, teacher’s parroting attitude does not help learners to enhance oral skills or communicative competence; this is the reason I have chosen to develop research on this aspect of EFL in our environment to show that teachers need to pay attention to the amount and type of talking they do, and to evaluate its effectiveness in the light of their pedagogical objectives (Nunan, D. 1991:198).

2. Working Methodology

For my investigation on the Teacher Talk Time as a means to implement or not the learner’s communicative skill, a questionnaire was administered to the pupils of some selected secondary schools in Bandundu town. It serves as my working instrument.

3. Division Of The Work

This paper is divided into four points: the first gives the definition of some terms. The second deals with research methodology used for the collection of data. And the third point mainly concerns the data analysis and interpretation and findings. The fourth and the last provides some suggestions. A conclusion and a bibliography end the present research.

4. Definitions Of Some Terms And Literature Review

4.1 Teacher talking Time (TTT)

The classroom setting is a crucial environment where a foreign language learner is exposed to the language as to acquire the target language. One of the opportunities offered to the learner to achieve that acquisition is the language used by teachers for their instructions or teachings in a classroom context, that language is known as Teacher Talking Time (TTT).

In Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Teacher Talking Time refers to the amount of class time the teacher spends speaking to the class, either as part of a teaching or in discussions. Particularly in ESL classes, more time needs to be given to pupils so that they can speak more. Foreign language learners improve more rapidly when they’re able to practice more often what they’ve learned.

According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* the term *Teacher Talk* is defined as “that variety of language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching. In trying to communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many of the characteristics of foreigner talk and other simplified styles of speech addressed to language learners” (Richards, 1992: 471).

Teacher Talk is also understood as means through which teachers address classroom language learners differently from the way that they would address other kinds of classroom learners according to Ellis (1994). As a result of this, the teacher makes adjustments regarding both language function and its form in order to help the teacher get a better use of the language. These ways of managing the language are referred to as "Teacher Talk". In the process of foreign language learning and second language acquisition, the Teacher Talking Time is very important for both classroom teaching organization and pupils' language learning because teacher talk is a means of implementing the teaching plan. In this way, Teacher Talking Time is usually seen as one of the decisive factors of success or failure in classroom teaching.

There are also some views given by some scholars such as Ellis (1985) who has formulated his own view about teacher talk: “Teacher Talk is the special language that teachers use when addressing L2 learners in the classroom.” Furthermore, he also argues that “the language that teachers address to L2 learner is treated as a register, with its own specific formal and linguistics properties” (Ellis, 1985: 145). It refers to the language that teachers use in language classrooms rather than in other settings. The teacher talk is a special communicative activity. Its goal is to communicate with students and develops students' foreign language proficiency.

Teacher talk is used in class when teachers are conducting instructions, cultivating learners intellectual ability and managing classroom activities. Teachers adopt the target language to promote their communication with learners. In this way, learners practice the language by responding to what their teacher says. Besides, teachers use the language to encourage the communication between learners and themselves. Therefore, we note that teacher talk is a kind of communication-based or interaction-based talk.

As Nunan (1991) points out: “Teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. It is important for the organization and management of the classroom because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail in implementing their teaching plans. In terms of acquisition, teacher talk is important because it is probably the major source of comprehensible target language input the learner is likely to receive.”

4.2 Classroom environment

Classroom environment is the classroom climate, the social climate, the emotional and the physical aspects of the classroom. It's the idea that teachers influence pupil's growth and behavior. The pupil's behavior affects *peer* interaction—the responsibility of influencing these behaviors is placed with the teacher. Therefore, the way each teacher organizes the classroom should automatically lead to a positive environment rather than a passive and/or an environment that is not conducive to learning.

To make it clear, teachers of English as a Second Language should learn to guide their pupils, not to alienate them. Hence, the safety of the pupil's well-being is paramount in their development of social ties with peers and their teacher. As education becomes more inclusive, teachers need to become more aware of how to organize groups of students and how the students are arranged can lead to a favorable environment. Well-organized classrooms are an important component to classroom functions as it leads to more dialogue and improvement of speaking skill. Combating bad behavior is the teacher's duty; he needs not to only take into consideration how the classroom is arranged, but also observes students' background, family life, grade, and all other complex issues surrounding life. Dörnyei (2003) also states that many competent L2 learners tend to avoid L2 communication.

4.3 Classroom Interaction

Classroom interaction is the pattern of verbal or non- verbal communication and the types of social relationships which occur within classrooms. The study of classroom interaction may be a part of studies of classroom Discourse, Teacher Talk and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This can be in the same line

with the interaction process analysis. It is one of several procedures for measuring and describing the behavior of students and teachers in the classrooms, in order to describe what happened during a lesson, to evaluate teaching, to study the relationship between teaching and learning, to help teacher- trainees learn about the process of teaching. To finish with this, it is noticeable that in interaction analysis, classroom behavior is observed and the different types of student and teacher activities are classified.

5. Research Methodology And Data Collection

The sample focus of this study was pupils of some secondary schools of Bandundu/Town, DRC. They were selected from the fourth and fifth forms of the school year 2017-2018. There were seventy-five pupils selected to whom a questionnaire was given through their respective teachers. The research instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire (see appendix 1) which was given to some pupils. It comprises eight multiple choice questions. It was administrated to pupils from January to February 2017. We noticed that most of the pupils were motivated to participate but they were still afraid of their teachers since it was for the first time to do such exercise. So, only sixty copies were collected.

This questionnaire is explained as follows: The first question aims at knowing the time teacher talk should take during English class; The second aims at identifying difficulties that students encountered while listening to English songs; The third seeks to detect the teachers’ talk time in an English class or teaching; The fourth aims at giving information about the length or the duration that the teacher of English takes in any English lesson; The fifth attempts to check the opportunities the teacher gives to pupils to group discussion to help them talk. For my investigation on the Teacher Talking Time as a means to develop learner’s communicative skills in an EFL class, a questionnaire was administrated to the pupils of some selected secondary schools in Bandundu town.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation And Findings

6.1 Data analysis and interpretation

The data gathered after the administration of the questionnaire to pupils were analyzed and interpreted as follows: After the collection of the questionnaire which was administrated to forty teachers of English selected from ten schools in Bandundu. The questionnaire included eight questions which aimed at knowing whether the teacher helps pupils to be fully participant during English classes through communicative activities. This questionnaire is explained as follows: The first question aims at knowing the duration that the teacher talk should take during English class. The second aims at determining the duration of learner talk time during an English lesson. The third seek to detect the teachers’ talk time in an EFL class. The fourth deals with the information given about the length or the duration that the teacher of English takes in any English lesson. The fifth attempts to check the opportunities the teacher gives to pupil’s discussion to help them talk.

Question 1. What should the teacher talk duration be during a lesson?

- a) 15-20 minutes b) 20 minutes c) 25-30minutes d) 35-40 minutes

Table 1: The teacher’s talk time in a lesson

Alternative	Number of learners	Percentage
15-20 minutes	5	8.3%
20 minutes	10	16.6%
25-30 minutes	20	33.3%
35-40 minutes	25	41.6%
Total	60	100%

This table one reveals the analysis of the question on the teacher talk time during an English lesson and there are four choices that the learner has to give. Among the sixty pupils (100%) there are only five pupils (8.3%) who answered saying that the teacher has to talk fifteen to twenty minutes during the English lesson; ten pupils (16.6%) said that the teacher’s talk time should be evaluated to twenty minutes; twenty (33.3%) answered that he should talk twenty-five to thirty minutes; and twenty-five pupils (41.6%) mentioned that he should talk thirty-five to forty minutes. A lesson takes fifteen minutes

Question 2. What should be the pupil/learner talk time during an English lesson/class?

- a) 20 minutes b) 25 minutes c) 30 minutes d) 40 minutes

Table 2: Pupil or learner talk time during an English lesson

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
20 minutes	35	58.3%
25 minutes	17	28.3%
30 minutes	5	8.3%
40 minutes	3	5%
Total	60	100%

The above table about the pupils’ talk time in the class shows that pupils talk less than the teacher; thirty-five (58.3%) answered that the pupil’s talk time should be 20 minutes; seventeen pupils (28.3%) responded that all the duration should be 25 minutes; five pupils (8.3%) said that they take thirty minutes; and three pupils (5%) revealed that the length of the talk should be forty minutes.

Question 3. How is your teacher talk time like in your particular class?

- a) Much more b) A little more c) Moderate d) Less

Table 3: What does your teacher’s talk time in your particular class?

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
Much more	32	53.3%
A little more	15	25%
Moderate	5	8.3%
Less	8	13.3%
Total	60	100%

The analysis of this question revealed that there is much more time taken by the teacher to talk: thirty-two pupils (or 53.3%) answered that the teacher often talks much more; fifteen pupils (25%) mentioned that the teacher often talks a little more; five pupils (8.5%) only said that the teacher is moderate while teaching; and eight (13.3%) responded that the teacher talks less during the instruction.

Question 4. How often are opportunities given to you for group discussion in the class?

A .Not at all

B. Sometimes

C. Rarely

D. Occasionally

Table 4: The opportunities given to the pupil to promote class discussion.

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
No at all	5	8.3%
Sometimes	4	6.6%
Rarely	20	33.3%
Occasionally	31	51.6%
Total	60	100%

It can be seen from the above chart that five pupils (8.3%) answered that they are not given opportunities at all to participate class discussion; four pupils (6.6%) mentioned that the teacher gives them opportunities for class discussion; twenty pupils (33.3%) answered that they rarely have opportunities for class discussion; and thirty-one (51.6%) revealed that occasionally the teacher gives time for such exercise.

Question 5. Do you want the teacher to give you some problems to debate in the class?

A. not at all

B. Sometimes

C. yes

D. always

Table 5: Problems solved through small group during the English lesson

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
No at all	30	50%
Sometimes	15	25%
Rarely	10	16.6%
Occasionally	5	8.3%
Total	60	100%

This chart demonstrates that among the sixty pupils who responded to the above question, thirty pupils (50%) revealed that pupils do not gather in groups to solve and negotiate meanings during the instructions; fifteen pupils (25%) showed that pupils lack this time to discuss among themselves; ten pupils (16.6%) answered that they rarely have this kind of exercise in the class in order to promote speaking skill; and five pupils (8.3%) have demonstrated that pupils have occasionally group debate to solve some problems.

Question 6. Do you prefer to practice the new language learned in class?

A. not at all

B. always

C. yes

D. sometimes

Table 6: The practice of the new language material learned

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
No at all	23	38.3%
Always	17	28.3%
Yes	15	25%

Sometimes	5	8.3%
Total	60	100%

Concerning the practice of the new language learned in the class, twenty-three pupils (38.3%) revealed that pupils do not prefer to practice the new material learned; seventeen pupils (28.3%) responded that pupils always practice the new lesson after the instruction; fifteen pupils (25%) mentioned that they have interest to revise by practicing the new language learned in the class; and five pupils (8.3%) acknowledged that sometimes they practice the new lesson learned in the class.

Question 7. What is the appropriate way according to you to answer the questions in class?
 A. in chorus B. being named C. volunteer

Table 7: The appropriate way to answer question during a lesson

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
In chorus	30	50%
Be named	2	3.3%
Volunteer	28	46.6%
Total	60	100%

To this question, among all the pupils who responded, thirty pupils (50%) mentioned that pupils wish to answer questions in group; two pupils (3.3%) pupils prefer to be named i.e the teacher should mention the name of the pupils, thus choosing him to respond; and twenty-eight pupils (46.6%) answered that they find that the teacher leaves it to the will of the pupils.

Question 8. Do you like your teacher to negotiate with you for correction?
 A. not at all B. sometimes C. yes D. always

Table 8: The negotiation of the correction between teacher and pupils

Alternative	Number of Learners	Percentage
Yes	59	98.3%
Sometimes	1	2.8%
Not at all	0	0%
Always	0	0%
Total	60	100%

The above table reveals that none of the pupils (0%) said not all for the negotiation that the teacher can always negotiate with the pupils; and one pupil (2.8%) answered that he sometimes wishes negotiation with the teacher for correction; and also only zero pupil (0%) one (2.8%) answered that he is ready for negotiation with the teacher about the correction; and lastly fifty-nine pupils (98.3%) mentioned that they want to negotiate for correction with their teacher.

6.2 Findings

From the above analysis of data collected, it was clearly revealed that the investigation was focused on some secondary schools pupils in Bandundu town in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Among the seventy-five pupils who received the questionnaire, only sixty pupils (80%) responded to it. The analysis shows that most of the teachers of English in some secondary schools in Bandundu do not give much time and opportunities to their pupils to interact with their peers during the instructions. The Teacher Talks Too Much (TTM) which is very negative for teaching process as far as the communicative aspect of the language is concerned.

As analyzed in the first table regarding the teacher's talk time during an English class, out of all the pupils (the sixty) who answered, twenty-five pupils (41.6%) said that teachers often talk more than pupils, he takes thirty-five to forty minutes which will not allow the learner to promote the communicative aspect of the language. Another group of pupils, twenty pupils (33.3%) also answered that teacher talks alone during twenty-five minutes, which should be an appropriate time that pupils may interact with peers; while ten pupils (16.6%) mentioned that the teacher took twenty minutes to present his lesson and less time is given to the pupils for the exercise and interaction; and unfortunately only five pupils expressed their view that the teacher should talk only for fifteen minutes and give more time to the learners.

Unfortunately the difficulties encountered by learners while having English class are considerable because the pupils' talk time is less; all of them (100%) don't have the same view about the teacher's talk, they talk less; thirty-five (58.3%) revealed that the teacher gives them only twenty minutes this it is very difficult for them to interact with peers; seventeen pupils out of sixty (28.3%) say what they often are given twenty-five minutes; while five pupils (8.3%) assert that they are given thirty minutes; and three pupils (5%) found that the teacher should talk more than the learners do.

For the promotion of class discussion, it was noticed that five pupils (8.3%) out of sixty are not given opportunities to class discussion; four pupils (6.6%) usually have a little time to class discussion; while twenty pupils (33.3%) rarely have access to class discussion; and thirty-one pupils (51.6%) occasionally have such exercise.

Indeed, concerning the problem solved in small group, thirty (50%) out of sixty pupils (100%) do not gather in groups to solve and negotiate among the peer during the instruction; fifteen pupils (25%) lack time to discuss among themselves; while ten pupils (16.6%) rarely have this kind of exercise to promote the speaking skill; and five pupils (8.3%) occasionally form a group to debate and solve some problems. As far as the practice of the new language is concerned, twenty-three pupils (38.3%) out of sixty pupils (100%) do not have interest to practice in the class the new material; seventeen pupils (28.3%) always practice the new lesson after the instruction; while according to fifteen pupils (25%) they are motivated to revise the new language learned; and five pupils (8.3%) sometime argue that they practice. Concerning the way questions should be answered in the class, thirty pupils (50%) among the sixty that say that it is the average who were in favour of answering in group; two pupils (3.3%) were happy that the teacher mentions their names so that they can answer; and twenty-eight pupils (46.6%) were happy that the teacher let people answer freely. For the negotiation of the meaning between the teacher and the pupils none of the pupils (0%) out of sixty pupils wish the negotiation; one pupil (2.8%) sometimes prefer to negotiate with his teacher and lastly fifty-nine pupils (98.3%) found negotiation very important between them and the teacher. The results above show clearly that all the pupils faced difficulties during the English classes to promote communicative skill.

7. Suggestions

This paper has shown that pupils of Bandundu secondary schools are not given opportunities to promote their communicative skill because the teacher talks too much during instructions. That is why this paper demonstrates that the teacher talking too much during an English lesson could not be a means to improve pupils' oral skill. We suggest some hints which can help both the teacher and the learner to have more opportunities to enhance the development of speaking skills: while teaching, the teacher should pay more attention to the learner, i.e. speak less.

1. Give more oral practice that can make pupils more confident to speak, providing a friendly environment;

2. Create an environment which involves teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner and also use practical and applicable strategies for pupils while speaking in English most of the time;
3. Find a balance between verbal instruction and pupil's interaction. Speak less during the English class and encourage pupils to speak more;
4. Spend more time for more exposure whereby pupils will have more opportunities to exercise their speaking competence;
5. Foster classroom interaction which will involve pupils in verbal exchanges between learners and learners;
6. Pupils give their thoughts on given topics assigned to them by the teacher and also pupils listen to classmates' thoughts and respond;
7. Encourage group presentations on a completed subject which meets the learner's interest and also think of awards and motivation for pupils;
8. From time to time create more opportunities for class debate, i.e split the class into two groups one against and another for;
9. The use of Role-Play should come every week in order to help learners to create confidence and motivate pupils to speak and help them overcome the language barrier,
10. Help pupils to give an oral report on a book, an event, weekly report, and radio's news regularly. We advise the teachers to take these hints or rules into consideration and try to use them in their teaching English as a foreign language. In so doing, they will be able to build learner's communicative competence and improve their speaking ability. The main suggestion is to help pupils with more opportunities to practice their English. Only then will it be possible for the pupil to be a fluent speaker and not to be afraid of communicating in any situation.

8. Conclusion

We conclude from our research that the teachers should encourage their pupils to become independent learners enhancing the quality of communicative competence moving away from routine and monotonous teaching. Thus, our implication from the research is that pupils should be involved in talk and communicate during English class.

Classroom interaction is very necessary and useful as an educational strategy to enhance speaking skills. The role of interaction in a classroom context in enhancing speaking skills comes from the understanding of its main types: teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction, where negotiation of meaning and the provision of feedback are highlighted. Pupils should be also involved in verbal exchanges between learners and teachers. Teachers should know that the learners need to do most of the talk to activate their speaking, since speaking skills require a lot of exposure and practice. The Teacher Talk Time should be 15% and the learner 75%, that means the learner is placed at the center not the teacher, the latter becoming a mere facilitator.

The problem of poor speaking ability is a crucial one in many secondary schools in Bandundu town simply because the teacher does not create a balanced atmosphere which involves teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction.

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Appendix 1: Student Questionnaire

1. What is the teacher talk time should be during a lesson?
A .15-20 minutes B. 20 minutes C. 25-30minutes D. 35-40 minutes
2. What is the pupil/learner talk time should be during an English lesson/class?
A. 20 minutes B. 25 minutes C. 30 minutes D. 40 minutes
3. What can be teacher talk time in your particular classroom?
A. much more B. a little more C. moderate D. less
4. How often opportunities do your teacher give you to class or group discussion

- A. 15-20 minutes B. 20 minutes C. 25-30minutes D. 35-40 minutes
5. Do you like the teacher give you some problems to debate in the class?
A. not at all B. a little C. yes D. always
6. Do you prefer to practice the new language learned in class.
A. not at all B. always C. yes D. sometimes
7. Do you wish to be given more opportunities to group discussion and talk in class?
A. no B. often C. yes D. always
8. Do you like your teacher negotiate with you for correction?
A. not at all B. sometimes C. yes D. always

Appendix 2: Some hints and advices from bloggers to reduce TTT

ESL Teaching Techniques to Cut TTT and Get Your Students Talking

“The

teacher doesn’t give the students enough time to talk.”

Every teacher has heard this criticism or something similar. Whether you’re getting it from students or supervisors, it’s something you probably want to change. Usually, we hear this when we first start teaching and still have to learn to adapt. Especially in quieter classes, teachers are inclined to talk more. However, students and administrations alike want less teacher talking time (TTT) in the classroom? How do we change the habit of talking too much in class? Is there a balance between verbal instruction and student interaction? Is there more to minimizing TTT than just motivating students

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What’s Teacher Talking Time (TTT)?

Teacher talking time refers to the amount of class time the teacher spends speaking to the class, either as part of a lecture or in discussions. Particularly in ESL classes, more time needs to be given to students so they can speak more—foreign language learners improve more rapidly when they’re able to practice what they’ve learned more often.

Don’t take this to mean that TTT is all bad — it’s not always a negative thing in the ESL classroom. Students need to hear a native speaker pronounce words correctly. Students also need to hear explanations as well as see them. Plus, sometimes you’ve just got to get the ball rolling.

It’s also worth mentioning that not all in-class instruction counts as TTT. Non-verbal cues and written instructions aren’t included in the TTT. Of course, those parts of the instruction time don’t count as student talk time either.

The goal is for you to take up no more than 50% of the class time with talking. This doesn’t mean that the other half of the class time needs to be totally filled with students talking, but students should all have their fair share of time to talk.

Why do teachers need to cut TTT?

Too much TTT can make your class boring.

I know, we’re all brilliant teachers and everyone loves the sound of our voices.

But the ESL class isn't about the teacher, it's about the students. The class should, therefore, be focused on the students with the teacher serving as a guide.

Reducing the amount of TTT will make the class more interesting for students—it may even make the class more interesting for you as well (your students can surprise you with insights and opinions on the topics covered in class, you just have to give them a chance to express themselves).

How will less TTT improve your class?

The more your ESL students talk, the more likely they are to improve. They learn best by doing. When you speak less, they fill in the empty spaces. With [adolescent students](#), it may be very challenging to get them talking at all. This is only harder when you're overwhelming them with TTT because they'll feel more complacent taking the back seat and simply listening to you.

While your students are talking more during classroom activities, you'll have the opportunity to make more corrections that they can learn from. They'll get used to making mistakes and being okay with that. This means that they'll be even more receptive to hearing those corrections and picking up what they need to do in the future.

When students are able to freely express their opinions in a class, they're more satisfied with the outcome. Even if they don't learn as much about grammar or vocabulary, they'll be advancing their practical speaking skills. In ESL programs, teachers need to maintain a balance between student satisfaction and academic achievement.

6 ESL Teaching Techniques to Cut TTT and Get Your Students Talking

1. Time yourself

If you've heard that criticism about the amount of time you spend talking in class, it's time to take action. Even if you haven't heard this comment specifically, it's worth the effort to improve your classroom manner and really get the most out of your class time.

The first step you should take is to time yourself.

Depending on how well you can naturally keep track of time, you may be able to estimate the time you spend talking. If you're not that good at judging time, bring a stopwatch to class. I always have to check my watch during class to ensure everything's running on schedule. Whenever you give instructions or lecture the class, use the stopwatch.

After class, calculate how much time you spent talking. If you filled up the majority of the class time, you need to make adjustments. Think back to which points in your lesson you spoke the most. How much was repetition? How much was answering student questions? How much was lecturing?

Take a moment to reflect.

At what points in your lesson could you have either cut out some of the speaking or replaced it with student-centered activity?

2. Add more detail to your lesson plans

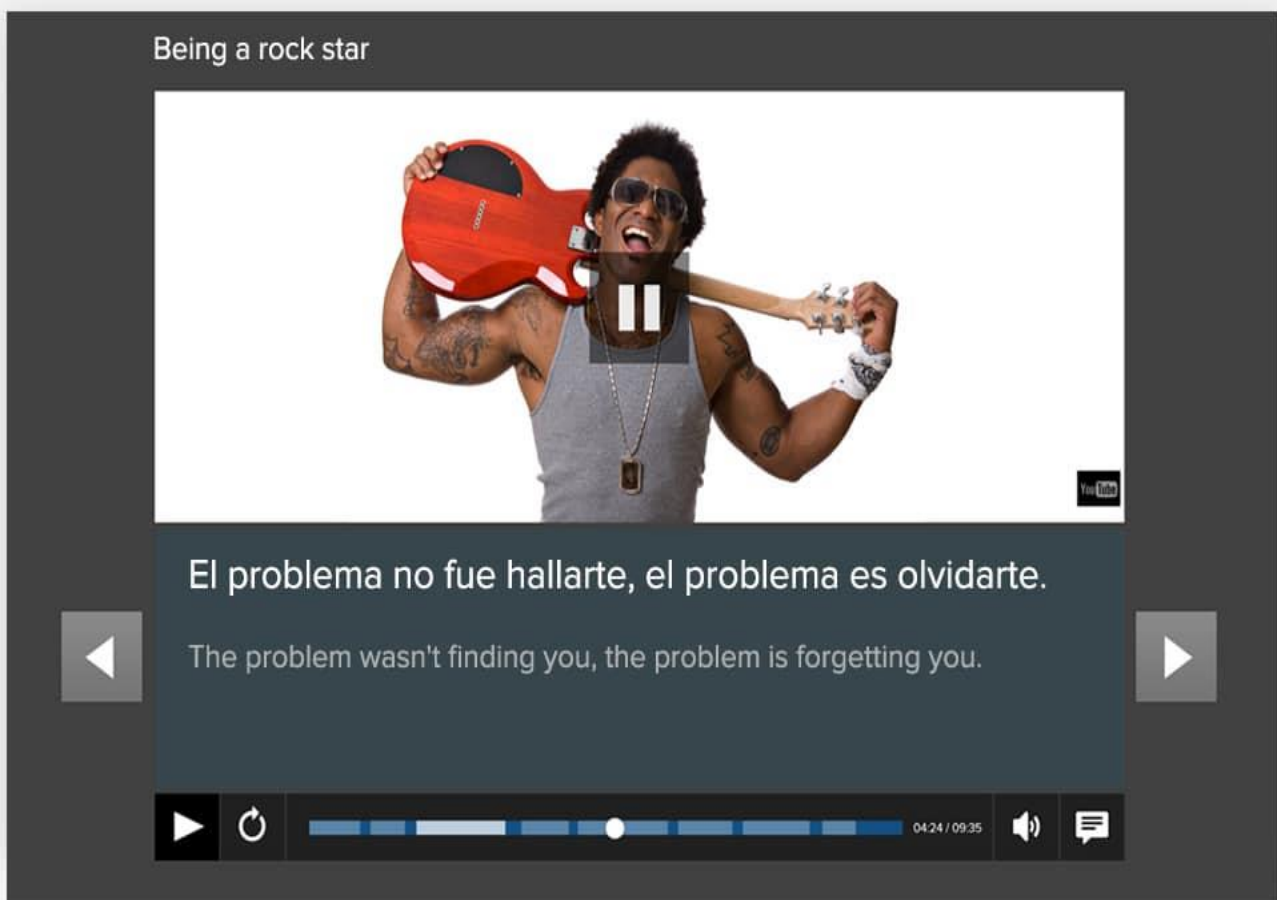
Are [your lesson plans](#) detailed? Or do you prefer a rougher outline?

If your choice is the latter, you may want to alter your approach. For those with too much TTT, it's important to plan more effectively. For every point you intend to cover in your lesson plan, you should have a talking time estimate. This'll help you keep track of your TTT.

When you've got more detail in your lesson plans, you'll notice points at which you'll tend to speak more or less. If your [lesson is full of activities](#) that require a lot of verbal instruction or lecturing, you need to find [alternatives](#). Split those more involved activities up into multiple lessons or replace them with [student-centered activities](#).

As you alter your lesson plans, evaluate the effectiveness every day. Sometimes we cut the TTT too much and lessons become less clear. Listen to your students and watch for their reactions to the reduction in TTT.

One type of non-TTT activity that your students might like is FluentU. [FluentU takes real-world videos like music videos, movie trailers, news, and inspiring talks, and turns them into English learning lessons](#). It lets students



The image shows a video player interface. At the top, the title "Being a rock star" is displayed. The video frame shows a man with sunglasses and a grey tank top, holding a red guitar over his shoulder. A play button is overlaid on the video. Below the video frame, there are two lines of text: "El problema no fue hallarte, el problema es olvidarte." and "The problem wasn't finding you, the problem is forgetting you." The video player controls at the bottom include a play button, a progress bar showing 04:24 / 09:35, a volume icon, and a chat icon.

Looking for a fun way to learn a language?

How about online language immersion with FluentU?

[Try FluentU for FREE](#)

3. Ask more leading questions

When you get into the heart of your lesson, you should encourage students to speak more. Rather than just asking questions throughout a lecture, try asking leading questions.

Which of these questions are your students more likely to answer?

What is the present progressive tense?

How can we talk about an activity that is happening right now?

The first question implies that your ESL students have read their textbook and understand clearly what the different verb tenses are. The second question may get students to describe the present progressive tense or provide an example without actually stating what the tense is. Some students may even answer the second question directly with “present progressive tense.” Either way, by providing more information through leading questions, you’ll trigger their memories better and allow them to answer however they can.

No matter how the students choose to answer that second question, they’ll see it as more engaging than the first. It’s more open-ended and they can come up with multiple ways of answering. Therefore, they’re more likely to answer the question without fear of being incorrect.

You may even change the question to “can we use present progressive tense to talk about daily activities?” As students answer this, you can ask follow-up questions that’ll lead the class to explain the verb tense in greater detail. This should provide the students with a better understanding of the grammar point overall.

4. Incorporate more group work into lessons

The easiest way to cut down on TTT is to use group activities. ESL students feel more at ease when speaking with their peers than when speaking in front of the class.

Whether you have your class practicing a dialogue or writing an introductory paragraph, have the students work in groups or pairs. The [students will learn from each other](#) and they’ll enjoy the time more—they certainly won’t be able to fall asleep at their desks like they sometimes do during a lecture.

There are even [listening activities](#) that can be done in groups to decrease TTT.

Group work allows you to [go around the classroom and listen to all your students](#). You can answer individual questions and provide more specific instructions to those who don’t fully understand the material.

5. Use more non-verbal cues

There are words or phrases that you repeat in class all the time. You’re tired of saying them and your students are tired of hearing them.

Replace them with non-verbal cues.

The first few times you use non-verbal cues, you should also say what you mean at the same time.

The class will pick up on the cue quickly.

After those initial few times, they’ll know what you mean just by looking at you.

Some of your non-verbal cues might involve tapping the board and pointing to specific words or phrases for students to read or repeat. If a student is reading a sentence written on the board and you point or tap one word, the student will understand that something is wrong and try again. There's a wide variety of gestures you could use. To find the ones that work best for your lessons and students, explore a little and see what students do. (Disclaimer: If you're teaching in a foreign country, research which gestures might be considered inappropriate or offensive before using them in class.)

If you don't think you're capable of providing adequate non-verbal cues, start playing charades with friends. Travel to a country where you don't speak the language and force yourself to communicate with your hands. Really, this will improve your ability to communicate with your students without actually speaking.

6. Ask for feedback

After evaluating your lessons and altering how you manage the class, you should be able to cut down on TTT. If you have a difficult time decreasing the TTT, ask for feedback—you may be able to have a colleague observe a class or even ask your students what they think of a lesson. Consider the advice and determine whether you can use it.

Asking for feedback in class is a sneaky way to boost their talking time. They'll have to try to express their opinions in English!

After you've cut the TTT, you may notice that your classes run smoother and your students are more engaged. Your students will then be more receptive if you have to revert to occasional lectures—they'll understand that it's a necessary evil of education. Over time, you'll find a better balance between your talking time and your students' talking time.

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Oh, and One More Thing...

If you liked these techniques, you'll love using FluentU in your classroom. [FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, cartoons, documentaries and more—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons for you and your students.](#)

It's got a huge collection of authentic English videos that people in the English-speaking world *actually watch* on the regular. There are tons of great choices there when you're looking for songs for in-class activities.

You'll find music videos, musical numbers from cinema and theater, kids' singalongs, commercial jingles and much, much more.